



Suffolk University
Center for International Education
8 Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108
Phone: (617) 573-8154
Fax: (617) 305-1751
E-mail: oia@suffolk.edu

Curricular Practical Training Information for Students in F-1 Status

Purpose

This handout will provide you with information on a type of employment opportunity which the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) calls “curricular practical training” or **C-P-T**. CPT allows students to work off-campus while pursuing a degree. ***DO NOT under any circumstances start reporting to your new workplace before you have received the CPT authorization I-20 from CIE.***

Definition of Curricular Practical Training

The USCIS defines “curricular practical training” as employment which is an integral or important part of your curriculum, including

...alternate **work/study, internship, cooperative education**, or any other type of required internship or practicum which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school.

According to the USCIS, the word “required” does not limit this type of practical training to work experiences that must be completed to earn the degree. Optional participation in the Suffolk University Co-operative Education program also qualifies as curricular practical training.

Job Eligibility Criteria

To be considered curricular practical training, the work **MUST** be related to your major field of study **AND** also be an integral or important part of your studies. **To guarantee that all proposed work for curricular practical training meets the eligibility criteria established by the USCIS, all employment (required or optional) must be registered with the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education (the Co-op office) through the Cooperative Education Program.**

To determine eligibility for the Co-op program, the counselors in the Co-op office will review the proposed position in terms of the appropriateness of the work for your degree program and level of studies. The employer must also be willing to participate in the evaluation process of the Co-op program. The Co-op office also has on-going relationships with local employers who offer positions that are pre-approved for the program.

Student Eligibility Requirements

Employment Which is a Required Part of a Graduate Degree Program- If (1) you are a graduate student; (2) you are maintaining lawful F-1 status; and (3) the proposed employment is a required part of your studies in the first year of the program, you may apply for permission to engage in curricular practical training whenever your program requires your participation, even if it is immediately upon beginning your studies. You can enroll in the Suffolk University Cooperative Education program or enroll in the required internship course as soon as necessary. Please note that to qualify for immediate CPT authorization before you have accrued 9 months in F-1 status, the internship must be **REQUIRED OF ALL STUDENTS** in your degree program as specified in the Suffolk University Catalog. If the internship is not required of all students to complete the program, it does not meet the criteria for immediate employment.

Employment Which is Not a Required Part of Your Degree Program- In order to be eligible to apply for permission to work in a job which is not a required part of your study program, you must (1) be in lawful F-1 status, and (2) have been a full-time F-1 student for either at least nine consecutive months or a full academic

year. Both graduate and undergraduate students must meet these criteria before enrolling in the Suffolk University Cooperative Education Program. Students who have had a break in F-1 status caused by time spent in another immigration status like H1-b or who have spent more than 5 months outside of the U.S. must re-accrue 9 consecutive months in valid F-1 status to be eligible for CPT. Similarly, students who have completed a travel re-instatement must also re-accrue F-1 status for 9 consecutive months.

English Language Students- Students enrolled in English language training programs are not eligible for curricular practical training.

Part-Time vs. Full-Time Curricular Practical Training

Part-Time Training- In the Fall Semester and the Spring Semester, USCIS regulations require you to maintain a full-time credit load of courses, and **employment can be no more than 20 hours per week. CIE does not have the ability to grant full-time employment during Fall or Spring semester even if the employer requires full-time work during these terms, so you may not be able to accept a position that is seeking a full-time employee. Employment in Fall and Spring is part-time regardless of the number of credit hours you are taking.**

Employment in the regular academic year is considered part-time curricular practical training. In such cases, the employment authorization that the International Student Advisor enters on page 4 of your I-20 will specify permission to engage in “part-time” training and you must be careful to limit the employment to no more than 20 hours per week. **You MUST be enrolled in a full-time credit load (12 credits for most majors) during the terms you are authorized for part-time curricular practical training.** Each curricular practical training period for which you are approved can be no longer than the length of a semester—approximately 15 weeks.

Full-Time Training- During your annual summer vacation term, employment may be for **21 or more hours per week**. This work is considered full-time curricular practical training. In such cases, the employment authorization that the International Student Advisor enters on page 4 of your I-20 will specify permission to engage in “full-time” training. Each curricular practical training period for which you are approved can be no longer than the length of a semester—approximately 15 weeks.

IMPORTANT NOTE: CPT authorization must be renewed prior to each authorization period (each semester, and each break). You must receive a new authorization before the expiration date. If the expiration date of your authorization passes, you must stop working until you have received the new authorization.

Curricular Practical Training and Eligibility for Optional Practical Training

The amount of time for which you are authorized for part-time curricular practical training *is not deducted* from the 12 months of Optional Practical Training for which a student may be eligible when he/she complete the academic program.

The amount of time for which you are authorized for full-time curricular practical training is not deducted from the 12 months of Optional Practical Training UNLESS you are authorized for a cumulative total of 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training. If you are authorized for 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training you will lose all eligibility for any type of Optional Practical Training (including Post-Completion Practical Training).

Application and Authorization Procedures

1. Check your immigration eligibility: Visit CIE so that an advisor can review your immigration status. You can visit CIE during the walk-in times—Monday – 10-2, and Tuesday and Thursday – 12-4. The advisor will evaluate the amount of time that you have held F-1 status and make sure that you have been enrolled full-time. If you are eligible for participation in CPT, the advisor will give you a Co-op eligibility form. This form verifies for the Co-op office that you have the immigration standing necessary for the curricular practical training benefit. Receiving a

co-op eligibility form is NOT an approval to begin working—it is an approval to begin looking for a job. You will not have the actual work permission until you complete all 4 steps listed here.

2. Find the job: Before you can receive a CPT authorization, you must first locate the job. You can do this on your own, or you can visit the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education at 20 Ashburton Place. Their hours are 8:45 am – 4:45 pm M-F. Evening hours are also available in the regular academic year. To confirm their hours, please call 617-573-8480. The Co-op office maintains a list of employers seeking students for Co-op positions.

3. Enroll in the Cooperative Education Program: Once you have your job offer letter, visit the Co-op office to register your employment and enroll in the Co-op program. At this stage, the Co-op counselor will evaluate your proposed employment and explain the requirements of the program. Once your enrollment is completed, the Co-op counselor will give you an enrollment form to bring back to CIE. As in step 1, this enrollment form is NOT a permission to begin working. It is a form to bring back to CIE to get the final work authorization.

4. Get the Work Authorization: Bring the Co-op registration and your original I-20 to the CIE. After you bring your documents it will require 5 business days to complete the CPT authorization. CPT is now authorized using the SEVIS program. SEVIS is the new electronic tracking system that is being implemented by USCIS. Because SEVIS is a USCIS-controlled software program, the system will not allow the university to enter any information on a student after a deadline has passed. This means that we cannot backdate the beginning of your CPT authorization. You **must** receive the CPT authorization **before** beginning to work.

Processing Note: It may take up to 2 weeks to finalize the authorization process. Visit CIE and the Co-op office well in advance of your proposed start date so that you will not face any delays. Delays often occur because documentation is not complete. Also, please keep in mind that the CIE will need 5 business days to authorize your CPT in SEVIS. Keep this in mind as you are discussing your start date with your employer.

USCIS Record Keeping

To document the CPT authorization, the dates and address of your employer will be listed on page 3 of your I-20. If you need to show proof of your employment authorization, you can show the authorization on page 3 of your I-20. Finally, please remember that once approved, curricular practical training will be counted whether or not you actually work for the entire authorized period of employment.

Employment Eligibility Verification

When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled *Employment Eligibility Verification* (INS Form I-9), which the employer retains. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission.

Social Security and Other Taxes

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U. S. less than five years are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. Your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state and local taxes.

A Note of Caution: While USCIS regulations provide a variety of opportunities for you to be employed during your time in F-1 status, working improperly or without authorization is a serious violation of your status. To protect your status, consult with the CIE before taking up **any** employment. **It is your responsibility to comply with all Immigration regulations that apply to F-1 students.** If you fail to comply with your responsibilities, you may not be eligible for benefits normally granted to F-1 students.

FINAL WORDS: DO NOT under any circumstances start reporting to your new workplace before you have received the CPT authorization I-20 from CIE.